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SWISS MISSION
TO SHANGAAN TRIBES
MISSION SUISSE ROMANDE

A RETROSPECT AND A FORECAST

BY

EDGAR H. BROOKES, M. A., D. LITT.

FIFTY YEARS OF MISSIONARY
WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA
1875 - 1925

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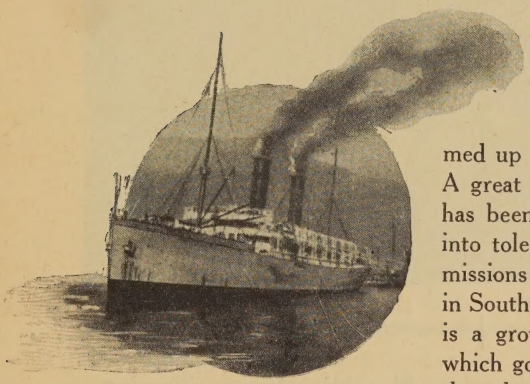
A Retrospect and a Forecast.

Fifty years of missionary work in South Africa

(1875-1925)



The day has long passed when the average white man's attitude to missions in South Africa was summed up in a curse or a sneer. A great deal of open hostility has been transformed at least into tolerant recognition of the missions as permanent factors in South African life; and there is a growing body of opinion which goes further and realises that the race problems of the country cannot be solved without christianity, and that, from every point of view, the evangelisation of the Bantu is imperative.

Public opinion is thus becoming more and more open to conviction on missionary questions, and this because of the presentation in pamphlets, from the pulpits and in the daily press of verified *facts* about missions. For instance, statistical research and enquiry has silenced for ever the frequently-repeated slander that there is a bigger percentage of criminals among christian, than among heathen, natives. Careful investigation has proved the incorrectness of many popular ideas about the educational methods of the missionaries, while the undoubted prosperity

and success of the Transkeian Territories where christianity has been at work longest and has permeated native life most deeply, has undoubtedly carried its own lesson for thoughtful men. Publications such as Dr. Loram's " Education of the South African Native ", Peter Mielsen's " The Black Man's Place in South Africa ", the Rev. C. Bourquin's " The Union's Native Problem ", and Dr. du Plessis's " History of Christian Missions in South Africa ",

Native Leaders, Johannesburg Conference 1923.

have helped measurably to mould public opinion. The institution of " Joint Councils " where white and black meet in regular conference on local race problems, the inauguration of University Courses in Native Studies, and the holding of great national conferences on the race problem such as that summoned by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1923 are all signs of the times. Never has there been a more hopeful moment for missionary activity within the Union of South Africa. Never has the need for men and money been more urgent in the Christian churches here.

* * *

It is on this rising tide of public opinion that the Mission Suisse Romande — the Mission representing the Protestant Churches

of French-speaking Switzerland — completes its African Jubilee; and it is in pursuance of the new policy of publicity, of the dissemination of verified facts, that the Mission is issuing, for the benefit of its many friends, — present and future, — in South Africa, this record of its activities during the half-century 1875 to 1925.

South Africans have a genuine suspicion of "foreign" missionaries — a legacy from the troublous days of a century ago. "Why do they come to us?" they ask; "Have they not heathen enough in their own colonies?" Such a remark is not always unreasonable, but the Swiss Mission can at any rate reply to it quite adequately. Switzerland is not an annexing State and has no Colonies. The missionary activities of the Swiss churches must take place inside the territories of other nations. South Africa is thus disposed to greet Swiss missionaries with less suspicion, and more good-will, than is the case with a great many others.

There are special reasons why French-speaking Switzerland should have close ties with South Africa. For the French-Swiss are the spiritual and social brethren of those noble Huguenot refugees who, landing here in 1688, infused into the South African people that heroic determination and passionate love for freedom which have been manifested so often in their history.

In 1833, at Moshesh's express request, the Paris Evangelical Society commenced work in the Lesuto. Once again a Huguenot immigration flowed into South Africa. Can it not be a boast that in both cases the motive was a love of pure religion and a zeal for the Gospel of Christ? All the world knows that it is the French Mission which has made Basutoland what it is to-day. For our present purpose, the chief interest here lies in the fact that the first direct connection of French-speaking Switzerland with South Africa was through the Paris Society. During the years 1859, 1860 and 1861, four missionaries of the Free Church of Vaud, bearing the well-known and honoured names of Mabille, Germond, Duvoisin and Ellenberger, began work under the Paris Society. The connection thus made between the missionary work of the French and Swiss Protestant Churches has never been broken; but Switzerland has always been an independent

land, and it was not long before the Swiss Churches conceived the grand project of commencing work in South Africa on their own account. Work had already been undertaken among the American Indians, but Swiss Protestantism felt a strong predestined urge towards Africa and the latter portion of the nineteenth century saw the forging of the chain of destiny which was to bind the two lands so closely together.

The Revds. E. Creux and P. Berthoud.

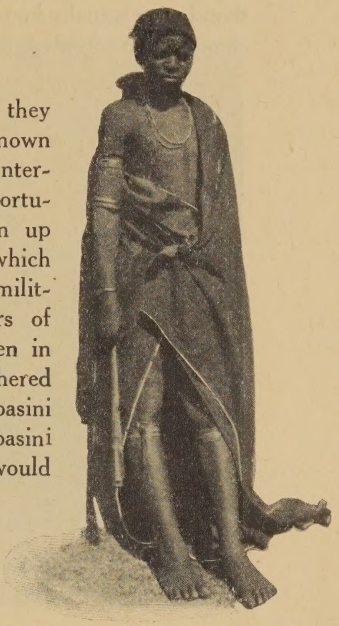
* * *

It was in the year 1869 that two young students in theology — Messrs. Ernest Creux and Paul Berthoud — offered themselves to their own church, the Free Church of the Canton de Vaud, as pioneers in the establishment of a Mission dependent directly from the Church. In the providence of God, these His veteran soldiers are still living, at the time of writing, Mr. Creux at Pretoria and Mr. Berthoud at Lourenço Marques, and it is our hope and prayer that He will spare them to participate in the Jubilee festivities and in the commemoration of the great work " quorum magna pars fuerunt ".

The two young pioneers spent a short time (three years) in the Lesuto, in the service of the Paris Mission, but supported by their own church. It was for them a wonderful opportunity to become familiar with the special problems of the African mission field, and also to select a sphere of work where they should come as little as possible into competition with other Christian bodies. A journey of exploration undertaken by Messrs. Mabille and Berthoud in 1873 determined the future activities of the Mission. It was decided to undertake the evangelisation of the Thonga people, at that time living in the North of the Transvaal (South African Republic) and in Portuguese East Africa. In 1874 the " Mission Vaudoise " was definitely founded by a decision of the Synod. Early in 1875 Messrs. Creux and Berthoud started on their long

" trek " by ox-wagon and on the 9th of July, 1875, they brought their journey to an end at a little spot in the Zoutpansberg which they named Valdezia, in honour of their native Vaud. From that day the definitive work of the Swiss Mission in South Africa begins.

* * *



The Thonga people, amongst whom they commenced their labours (commonly known to-day as " Shangaans ") had had a very interesting history. Originally all living in Portuguese East Africa, they had been broken up and harassed by the perpetual warfare which followed on the foundation of the Zulu military empire by Tshaka. Large numbers of them had fled to the Zoutpansberg, then in wildly primitive condition, where they gathered round a Portuguese adventurer named Albasini whom they recognised as their Chief. Albasini was a strange character, who, while he would occupy a relatively low position judged by the standards of conventional morality, was possessed of great ability and firmness. Both the South African Republic prior to 1877 and the British Administration of the Transvaal (1877-81), having found it too difficult to subdue him, thought it best to come to terms with him and to recognise him as " Native Commissioner " of his huge district. The greater part of the people, however, remained in the District of Lourenço Marques under Portuguese rule, and these the Mission did not touch until 1882.

* * *

Great indeed were the difficulties attending the foundation of the Mission. First were the difficulties of language. Not only had the missionaries to study Thonga incessantly, to provide it with an orthography and a grammar and to translate into it the Holy Scriptures, but they had also to master Dutch (and later English) or Portuguese — according to their sphere of work — at

least sufficiently to make themselves intelligible to the local officials and white residents. The Governments concerned were not sympathetic. The South African Republic was suspicious of many phases of missionary endeavour. Messrs. Creux and Berthoud were actually imprisoned for a short time without any formal charge. The kindest explanation of this is that the Paris mis-

Preaching in the Kraals.

sionaries had — rightly or wrongly — assisted the Basuto, by giving advice and sheltering fugitives, in their war against the Orange Free State and that the sister-republic not unnaturally confounded the Swiss with the French missionaries. The unkindest explanation is that the Republic had at that time a fundamental hostility to "foreign„ missionaries of any kind, except the Germans. Later the Portuguese authorities, then under a clericalist régime, were most reluctant to admit Protestant missionaries into regions under their control. Year by year, these varying prejudices have been lessened by the good effect of contact and the indisputable success of the Mission in its civilising and educative work.

Then, too, the pioneers had agonising moments of personal bereavement to pass through. The brillant moments of 1876, the baptism of the first converts, the Lord's supper participated

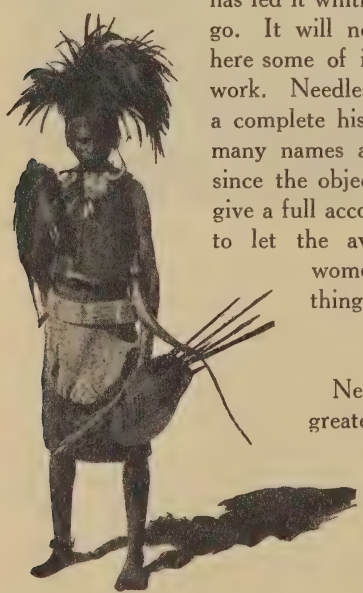
in by Swiss, French and German missionaries and their converts, where Messrs. François Coillard and Schwellnuss and their people joined the Swiss Church in its rejoicings — these were soon overshadowed by sickness and death. Mr. Berthoud lost his wife and all his children within the space of twelve months, and Mr. and Mrs. Creux also two of their little ones. Mr. Berthoud had to return to Europe for a short time, but was soon back at the post on duty, where his colleagues had held the fort in the meantime. There needs no purple patch of eloquence to emblazon this simple story. Those who know South Africa will read between the lines and understand. African Christianity has been built up on blood and tears, and the lives of white women and little white children have paid the price for the redemption of the black races from paganism and savagery. May they never forget, as they advance in civilisation and true happiness, what they owe to the white men and women who have spent themselves for Africa's sake. May white South Africa understand, better than it does to-day, how great is its debt towards " foreign " missionaries, who have wrought so nobly while the South African Churches themselves were as yet inactive and indifferent ! The writer speaks as a South African in saying this, and would venture to quote from his own " History of Native Policy in South Africa " (pages 446-7) : " One thing is very certain — that we must not scorn or make light of the work of missionaries who have patiently devoted their careers,

Cemetery at Elim.

and sacrificed in many cases distinguished and brillant futures, to do for our faith and our country what we have signally failed to do ourselves ".

* * *

Since those early days, the work in the Transvaal has grown and prospered, and God has blessed it exceedingly. At the end of 1923, there were seven centres with numerous out-stations, and some thousands of Native members, catechumens and adherents. Wonderful work has been done, for the Swiss Mission has had a pioneering genius and a devotion which has led it whither many others have feared to go. It will not be out of place to examine here some of its specially interesting pieces of work. Needless to say space does not permit a complete historical survey to be made, and many names and places must go unrecorded, since the object of this little *brochure* is not to give a full account of the Mission's history, but to let the average liberal-minded men and women in South Africa know something of the Mission's work.



A Witch Doctor.

* * *

Next to the Gospel itself, the greatest need of the African Natives is training in hygiene and medical care. Sickness and death are common events in the little hill-side villages, and the Native " medicine-man ", although sometimes a skilful herbalist, is generally a posi-

Native Quarters, Elim Hospital.

tive danger to his clientèle, and always an agency for superstition and misery. Belief in witchcraft is the base of Bantu life, and Native medical methods encourage that belief. It is not

Main Building, Elim Hospital.

merely a counsel of expediency that brings Christian missions in Africa to employ medical men and to found hospitals. Devotion to Christ, the Healer, demands that the Church undertake the care of men's bodies as well as of their souls. From the earliest days, the Swiss missionaries received at least an elementary medical training, but it was not until 1891 that the first professional Doctor arrived in their African field — Dr. Liengme. In 1897 he took up work at Elim, and the present Elim Hospital commenced its beneficient work in the following year. It has been the most popular pieces of work undertaken by the Mission, as far as the whites are concerned, for in that particular part of South Africa hospitals are few and far between. Even Doctors are separated by great distances. Many European settlers owe their lives to Elim and during the South African war Boer and British wounded received impartial kindness there. To the Natives the work has been invaluable. Not only has it meant the relief of physical pain and suffering, but it has also been a potent force at work against the enslavement of the mind which comes from the belief in witchcraft.

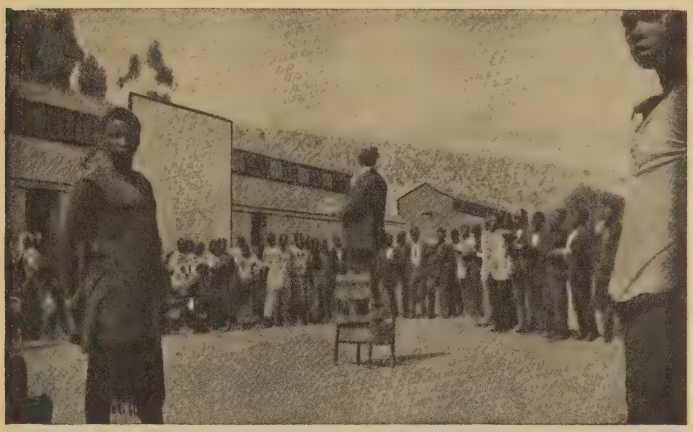
Native Leper.

* * *

Central Gaol, Pretoria.

While speaking of the Mission's works of mercy, one might say a word as to its spiritual care of the Native lepers in the Pretoria Leper Hospital. More than one-third of the patients are adherents of the Mission, which strives

to remedy their pitiful lot as much as it possibly can. The work demands great self-sacrifice, resolution and sympathy. But these have not been wanting. This great undertaking was carried on by the Rev. E. Creux for just over twenty years —



Rev. R. Wilson preaching in the Compounds, Johannesburg.

from the end of 1902 to the beginning of 1923 — and is now in the hands of the Rev. C. Bourquin.

* * *

Pretoria is an exacting station. Not only is there, in addition to the ordinary work of a mission centre, the care of the lepers, but also the chaplaincy to the prisons including the Central Gaol for the Province. The nature of the work there, particularly the recurring cases of death-sentenced prisoners, is such as to make enormous demands on the inner life as well as on the physical health of the chaplain. Yet it is a wonderful joy to the Church to feel that in Pretoria she is doing her Master's work and carrying His message of pity, mercy and regeneration to the " untouchables " of South African society.

* * *

Johannesburg is, of course, the biggest urban centre of the Mission as regards numbers. It is at once the State's despair

and the Church's opportunity. For amid all its crime and sordidness stands out the fact that its masses of Native labourers herded together in Compounds, from practically every race or tribe in this part of the world, form the best evangelising centre in South-Central Africa. The work of the Rev. S. Bovet and his assistants is chiefly (though not exclusively) among the Shangaans, many of whom are attracted to the mines from Portuguese Territory.

Girl Students at Lemana Training Institution.

Quite a number of these are members or adherents before they reach Johannesburg, but there is a great deal of direct evangelising work — the saving of the heathen as well as the confirming of the faithful. The dozen or more centres in the mining area are not the least fruitful phase of the Mission's activity.

* * *

Space is lacking to go into the sterling work carried on in the Northern Transvaal, on the scattered Mission Stations and the Locations and farms; but a word may be added before passing to the second area of the Mission's activity, as to the Training School at Lemana.

Founded in 1906, it has in the intervening period amply justified its existence as a training centre for teachers and evangelists, serving other Protestant Churches as well as the Swiss Mission itself. In 1924, the students numbered about 100. — And here a word may be said as to the literary, scientific and educative work of the Mission generally. It has discovered and given to the world the Thonga and Ronga dialects, and to the Natives of these races themselves, has been the provider of a literature

Industrial work, Lemana. Bricklaying.

secular as well as directly religious. In the field of scientific ethnography no single figure has stood out more prominently in modern South Africa than the Rev. Henri Junod. In the humbler sphere of direct education of the young, the Mission has done excellent work. From the beginning its activity has been industrial and agricultural as well as purely literary, and it is interesting to note that the introduction of the plough to the Transvaal Natives in the Spelonken was due historically to the Rev. E. Creux. The sum of £ 12 was paid for the first plough !

* * *

The work in Portuguese East Africa began in 1880 by the visit to his own country of a Portuguese Native, Josefa, who had been

converted at Valdezia. In 1882 he went forward, accompanied by two other evangelists, with the direct authorisation of the Church. In 1885 the Revds. H. Berthoud and E. Thomas were sent on a special mission to "spy out the land" and to strengthen the small body of the faithful. Finally in 1887, the Rev. Paul Berthoud arrived from Valdezia at Lourenço Marques, where he still remains in honoured retirement, the father of this great section of the Mission. An establishment was immediately founded at Rikatla. Within a few years a church was built at Lourenço Marques, and shortly thereafter at Antioka. Amid great difficulties with the Government, the Roman Catholic Church and the heathen chiefs, and dogged by the disappointments and backslidings which always accompany early missionary enterprise, the work went forward. The Southern portion of the Territory proved at first fruitful ground, but lack of volunteers from Switzerland for the work and the incapacity of many of the new converts to stand the severe tests of temptation and persecution caused a temporary set-back. In the South the Church has fought hard for existence; and the battle is not yet won, for there are still one or two spots which were once occupied and are today abandoned. The little groups of faithful there send out pleas for help. When is it going to come ? It is one of the most pressing duties of the Church, awaiting only — men and money.

The set-back in the South has been compensated for by the cheering progress in the Centre and North. The general history is decidedly one of advance. Even the great industrial revolution which has resulted in so many thousands of Natives from Portuguese Territory coming to work for months or years at a time on the Johannesburg mines has not been able to check the forward movement. Whether the exploitation of these people for the sake of the cheapness of their labour is justifiable on the lines of christian ethics or national policy is open to doubt, but the cheerful facts remain : 1) that the "Shangaans" are admittedly

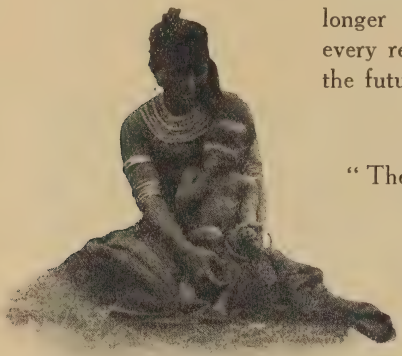
the best workers on the mines, and the Mission is proud of that; 2) that the Christians of the Mission have been an influence for good among their heathen brethren; 3) that the great mining Companies are favourably disposed to the evangelising work of the Church, and are providing better conditions of life and hous-

Swiss Mission Church at Lourenço Marques.

ing for their Native employees; 4) that the town life, unfavourable in many respects, has had the advantage of sharpening the wits of the Natives and giving them greater access to educational facilities.

The activities of the Mission in Portuguese Territory are as manysided as in the Transvaal. The Medical Missions at Lourenço Marques and Chikhumbane have had most useful careers since their inception. At Rikatla, there is a fine training school for Evangelists which is for the Portuguese area what Lemana is for the Transvaal. All over the district of Lourenço Marques, Mission stations and churches, and little knots of the faithful here and there at distances from the main centres, act as a leavening influence on Native life, and in spite of the presence of much to

degrade and brutalise are a living force for righteousness, goodness and industry. Under the present régime, the difficulties experienced by the early missionaries are no longer what they were ; and there is every reason for hope and optimism for the future.



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"The future !" It is on that word that we must linger. What is the future of the masses of Natives in South Africa to be ? One thing is certain — that without christianity and its compelling spiritual powers that future is going to be appalling to contemplate or to describe. Whether it is to be a dead sensual cruel paganism, whether it is to be a militant and savage mahometanism, whether it is to be a degraded caricature of white civilisation adopting the vices without acquiring the virtues of European society — this matters

Medical Mission, Chikhumbane.

little beside the fact that unless christian missionary work is actively prosecuted in South Africa *now*, one of these fates threatens large numbers of the Bantu.

No longer is it possible for the educated European to treat missionary work with amused and tolerant contempt. It is the chief weapon with which the " thin white line of civilisation " (as General Hertzog, the Prime Minister of South Africa, has recently described it) is going to maintain its existence in South Africa from a civic and national point of view. An immediate aggressive missionary movement is an imperative necessity.

To the convinced Christian these arguments of expediency, urgent as they are, are but secondary. First and foremost rings out the Christ's great charge " Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature ". No white christian has the right to lift his hands in prayer, to meditate the

Agricultural Work.

wisdom of the scriptures, to receive the sacred Bread and Wine, unless some thought and care for the child-races around him mingles with sacrament, with meditation, with intercession.

The Rev. Samuel Malale.

* * *

The Swiss Mission asks for the prayers of the faithful, and particularly for the prayers of white South Africa. It asks for men. It asks for money. That sordid appeal for funds! how we hate it, do we not? And yet it is one of the things in which the ordinary christian can help so much. Conscientious almsgivers are the munition-workers behind the forces in the field. We cannot all be in the front rank of active service, nor ought we all to desire it. Our talents are different. But all can pray, and all can give. Do you think that missionary work is conducted on wrong lines? In this little brochure we have tried by a simple presentation of historical facts to prove the contrary. If you are still in doubt, *come and see.*

Above all, do not, on peril of your soul, if you call yourself a christian, condemn missionary work in your conversation without knowledge and enquiry. If you do, remember that you are branded in the sight of God as a traitor to the work of Christ and an enemy to His Church.

The Rev. Jonas Mapope.

But *do*, by all means, enquire and investigate for yourself. Scepticism and examination are the conditions of progress. The Churches of the Reformation cannot be hostile to them. The

Native Pastors of the Swiss Mission.

Swiss Mission confidently challenges the fullest investigation of honest and fair-minded men who are doubtful as to present day missionary methods. May it be the case that this pamphlet set many such men on the path of loyal enquiry !

Edgar H. Brookes.

The Swiss Mission Stations
in the Transvaal and Portuguese East Africa.

CHAMP DE LA MISSION SUISSE ROMANDE

Swiss Evangelical Mission to Shangaan Tribes.

MISSION SUISSE ROMANDE

Headquarters in Switzerland : 2, Chemin des Cèdres, Lausanne.

Rev. A. Grandjean, General Secretary.
Rev. Abel de Meuron, Secretary.
Rev. D. P. Lenoir, Secretary.

Mission Stations in Northern Transvaal :

Valdezia, Elim (incl. Hospital and Lemana Training Institution), Kurulen, Mhinga, Shiluvane, Nwamitwa, Mpisane.

Mission Stations in Central Transvaal :

Pretoria (incl. Leper Asylum, Prisons, Hospitals), Johannesburg (about 60 Centres and Schools in the Rand Labour Area).

Mission Stations in Portuguese East Africa :

Lourenço Marques (incl. Hospital), Tembe, Matutuene, Nwapulane, Antioka, Gidja, Magule, Chikhumbane (incl. Hospital), Manjakaze, Chichongi, Rikatla (incl. Training School for Evangelists).

Headquarters in the Transvaal :

Rev. Chs. Bourquin, 376, vom Wielligh Street, Pretoria
Rev. S. Bovet, 32, Height Street, Johannesburg.

Headquarters in Portuguese East Africa :

Rev. P. Loze, Caixa 21, Lourenço Marques.

Donations and Subscriptions are thankfully received at any of the above addresses, and at the Headquarters at Lausanne.
Bequests to be made to " Mission Suisse Romande ", Lausanne.

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